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## A New Era of Women Against the World

### **Introduction**

Ever since the creation of Superman, the notion of superheroes has prevailed in society. The idea of what makes a superhero has grown. There are superhero stories written today that would have been ridiculed, or never even dreamt of, in the 1930's. Not only has the form of superhero stories changed, but so has the idea of who can be a superhero. No longer restricted to brightly colored spandex, a superhero can wear anything. No longer limited to physical abilities, a superhero could just be someone with a big gun nowadays. Even more important, however, is that no longer a club of Caucasian men, a superhero can be anybody. As was shown with the spidersona movement in the wake of *Spiderman: Into the Spiderverse*, where people made themselves into either spiderman or spiderwoman, people of all walks of life are seeing themselves as superheroes no matter their ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or sexual orientation. This kind of diversity is the motivation behind this project. This project seeks to add to the growing diversity present in the superhero canon by addressing specific flaws with and gaps in past representation, specifically of women. Instead of simply writing a comic book of my own, this project instead seeks to combine academia and creative writing to create a compendium of new female superheroes. This project will contain ten new female superheroes with three elements: a fictional biography and overview of the character, a grounding in academic articles

or books as a reason for the character to exist, and finally original artwork of the character created for this project. In addition, the character names, biography, and concept art will be put in public domain so that anyone can tell the stories of these heroes. The reason for this is the fact that I understand other writers may be able to contribute experiences and a writing style to these characters that I cannot. In the interest of these characters actually making a difference in the superhero canon, the ability for more people to use them in a vein similar to folk heroes seems imperative. The art for this project has been done by Victoria Hauck, who listened attentively to every character idea and explained which character looks would best translate to painted works. Her input guided the visuals of this project, as I much more skilled with words than a paint brush.

### **Literature Review**

To best approach this project, a variety of texts were chosen as I sought out gaps in the superhero canon. When reading journal articles about superheroes that pointed out problems, dilemmas, or flaws, a character would be created to be put this project in conversation with that text. These characters are all responses to other texts, or inspired by a similar character and sought to improve upon them.

Before creating specific characters, however, an overall tone for the project had to be set. Several works influenced the direction of this project and are the strongest backbone for this study to be built upon. The first text considered, that was the beginning inspiration for the entire project, was Kaysee Baker and Arthur A. Raney's "Equally Super?: Gender-Role Stererotyping of Superheroes in Children's Animated Programs." In this article the authors studied 70 characters considered superheroes on television and did a study of the different traits they

possessed. Of the characters surveyed, only 34.3% were female, which was the first indication that a project like this was needed. Even though some of the shows sampled, such as *Kim Possible*, only had female superheroes, women were still outnumbered almost two to one. From there, further percentage breakdowns led to more specific ideas about this project. 79.2% of the women were Caucasian, while only 45.7% of the men were. The actual number of characters is similar: 19 women to 21 men. The problem though is that only one African American woman was found, while two African American men were, two Asian men, a Hispanic man, and 15 of indeterminate ethnicity. No Asian or Hispanic women were found at all, and only two were of indeterminate ethnicity. While the severe lack of ethnic minorities in either gender is a problem, this example of intersectionality shows that this project creating women of ethnic minorities will help fix both problems of not enough women in comics and not enough ethnic minority characters in comics.

Similarly, there was also a lack of diversity in body type. Two characters of each gender were found to be slim, while 16 men and 19 women were average. 19 men, however, were muscular or athletic, compared to zero women. Seven men were overweight compared to only two women. Furthermore, women were approximately 12% more likely to wear revealing clothing, and the researchers only studied shows appropriate for children. That statistic is the most troubling, and led to this project focusing on characters wearing less revealing clothing. Of course, revealing does not automatically mean bad, and children are not the only demographic of superhero fans. Just as nudity can be good in material for adults, this project did not aim to be too prudish, but rather try to provide good examples of women who kick butt without having to bear their bodies.

Two works that further cemented the direction the project would take were *Heroines of Comic Books and Literature: Portrayals in Popular Culture* and “‘Sweetheart, This Ain’t Gender Studies’: Sexism and Superheroes.” Both of these works discuss how women often end up with a more defense or support oriented power set. These include things such as shrinking, healing, or making force fields. The former work focused on the Marvel Comics universe specifically Wasp, Jean Gray, and Invisible Woman, while the latter work focused on the TV show *Heroes* and its female characters. These works reported that women superheroes were often written with powers that kept them from being effective on their own. In the case of invisible woman, all she can do is hide and protect, she cannot attack anywhere near as directly as her three male teammates. In the show *Heroes* the most important woman on the show is constantly having to be saved by her male teammates. Because of these works, a potential pitfall of this project was established. If all the characters made for this project had defensive or support oriented power, than they would just be falling into past tropes, and no progress would be made. I want these characters to be great on their own, not just when they are surrounded by men.

The final work to influence the large scale side of this project was Mike Madrid’s book *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*.” This book is a timeline of female superheroes, beginning in the 1940’s. While most of the articles I read discussed characters of the last 20 years, Madrid’s book provided insight into bygone eras that had ideas the mainstream population was not ready for yet. This book was able to provide examples of powerful female characters who never quite caught on, many of whom are now in the public domain. Characters such as Miss Fury and the Woman in Red are discussed in the opening chapter of the book. Both of these characters are fascinating well thought out heroes.

Miss Fury is a rich heiress who ends up a hero reluctantly but grows to accept her newfound position. The Woman in Red is similar to a detective, and fights crime with an atmosphere of mystery around her. Characters like this would fit in perfectly in today's comic book landscape, and due to being in public domain, can be written by anyone. As such, because of this work, a public domain character is being remade for this project.

With the direction of the project set, more specific problems had to be found that would be addressed by individual heroes. With the diversity problem that was shown earlier, I specifically wanted to look at Muslim characters in comics. One of the first Muslim characters in Marvel Comics was Dust. She is part of the New X-Men, and in an article by Julie Davis and Robert Westerfelhaus entitled "Finding a place for a Muslimah Heroine in the Post-9/11 Marvel Universe: New X-Men's Dust." This article found that although many characters in Marvel Comics are religious, as one of the few Muslim characters, Dust talks about her religion more and has more plots related to it. She is treated as a link between the Western World and Islam. On its own, having a Muslim character that discusses their faith is good, but it seems that the writers and artists have a disconnect. Although she is very devout to her religion, she wears skintight clothing that shows the very clear outline of her waist and breasts. This project acknowledges the problems present in Dust that this article pointed out. Two of the major problems are her clothing and that she is expected to teach everyone about her faith. She is not an ambassador, she is just another person. With that, another article was found that would help to contribute to this new character. "The Hijab as a Protective Factor for Body Image and Disordered Eating: a Replication in French Muslim Women," looked at the eating disorders present in French Muslim women. While the study itself is interesting, the more important part

for this project is the way the article describes life for Muslim women in France. Hijabs are banned from public schools, and face coverings are completely banned in public. As such, I decided to create a French Muslim woman superhero using these articles as a basis to create this character.

The next character this project focused on is an interesting hybrid of both my personal past and an article. In a High School creative writing class I created a character by the name of Solar Flare, but never fleshed out or published the character. When looking at articles I wanted to see how I could retool Solar Flare from just another generic character into something meaningful. In Rebecca Wanzo's article "The Superhero: Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation and Desire," the comics *Watchmen* and *Strange Girl* were discussed. The article discussed how in a world of superheroes people need to be wary of which heroes they put their trust in. The article claims that we are now at a point in superhero comics where deeper, mature ideas can be discussed. Specifically the idea of how salvation and God should be seen in a world of these heroes. This seemed like the perfect discussion to apply to Solar Flare, and thus the character was reborn.

A commonality in comic books with superheroes is to create a woman that is both animalesque and still traditionally beautiful. Tigra is covered in cat hair and is possessed by a cat spirit, yet still has the perfect stereotypical model figure. Miss Thing is a literal rock monster just like the male version of the Thing, but where his head is made of rock, she still has a beautiful human face and full head of long, flowing hair. In her article "Batman's Female Foes: The Gender War in Gotham City," Shannon Austin brings up the concept of "The Other." While some of Batman's villains are just normal men who happen to be crime bosses, such as Black

Mask and The Penguin, the woman need something special to make them able to compete.

Austin argues that the only reason Catwoman is taken seriously is her feline mystique taken on in her costume and claws she outfits herself with. Similarly, Poison Ivy has superpowers, and Harley Quinn has her insanity. They all have something that makes them other, but the feline aspect of Catwoman is the most interesting. Taking the idea of the “Feline Other” and applying to superpowers led to creating a superhero who is closer to a feral animal than human.

Daniel M. Shafer and Arthur A. Raney wrote the article “Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives,” which looked at how the new generation of fans has come to accept heroes who are not quite as righteous as Superman. An antihero is someone who does good overall, even if they themselves are not morally right. What the article found is that people who have been exposed to antihero narratives in the past are more likely to enjoy an antihero narrative now. With more and more antiheroes being created today, the amount of people who have been exposed to antihero narratives is increasing. With that idea in mind, in order to tap into a larger portion of superhero fans, this project will include an antihero character.

When deciding who would be the antihero, I studied the articles I had chosen to see what other character trait might fit well with that. The book *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* includes an essay on wrestling icon Chyna. At the time of writing, Chyna is just now being inducted into the World Wrestling Entertainment Hall of Fame, which is a sign that characters like her are now being respected and craved. Chyna began her wrestling career being seen as a monster more than a woman according to the essay. The moment that the audience began to see Chyna as a beautiful woman was when she got breast implants. She fought many of the male wrestlers including Jeff Jerret who was her main rival. This storyline was

criticized throughout the article because although the overall story was Chyna showing everyone how misogynistic Jerret is, the story still had many problematic elements including Jerret beating women up who were not in matches. Using Chyna as a sort of template leads to the new character of this project that wrestles by day and functions as a vigilante antihero by night. This dichotomy has standing in past superheroes who have been wrestlers and wrestlers who have been superheroes.

As this project deals with feminism and gender studies, a look at modern feminism is important to the project and led to the creation of a new character. Chris Holmlund broke modern feminism down into three categories: “academic,” “Chicks,” and “Grrrls.” The academic and grrrl types play off of one another in a way that directly influenced the project. The academic archetype is someone who would do this project: they are someone who cares about the logic, the theory, and the history of gender studies. The grrrl archetype cares about equality just as much, but the way they go about seeking equality is different. While the academic uses very formal channels of communication such as education and books, the grrrl uses things such as informal discussions in a coffee house. There is also a more rebellious, DIY, punk style to the grrrl. This led to a character divided in half, in the vein of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who uses both the academic and grrrl archetypes: the academic in her day job, the grrrl as a superhero. This merging of a literary trope and an academic finding is what the liberal arts are all about.

Throughout comic books and superhero stories, certain types of people have their stories told over and over again. *Woman Fantastic in Contemporary American Media Culture* includes an essay about this very idea. The essay spotlights the comic *Journey to Liberty* which fights



back against negative stereotypes about single mothers. The series takes a character often pushed to the side of conversations and puts them front and center. This notion of taking a marginalized character and bringing them to the front of the discussion inspired the decision to introduce a latinx teenage character. Although other characters of this type do exist, I needed something to truly set them apart. That dovetailed into my research that was done on an often ignored social media: Pinterest.

“New Media Producing New Labor: Pinterest, Yearning, and Self-Surveillance,” is an article by Hillary A. Jones describing the impact of the social media platform Pinterest. The article describes Pinterest as a digital comparison to scrapbooking. The same way that scrapbooking was seen as a primarily feminine activity, Pinterest is also seen as a platform with a primarily female user base. The visual appeal of organizing everything is similar, but the difference is the sense of yearning created by Pinterest. While scrapbooking is mostly about recapping or sharing past events, Pinterest is about inspiring people to do new projects. This sense of yearning to make one more craft, one more recipe, or one more fashion statement propels the platform forward allowing it to grow. This yearning is the unique selling feature of Pinterest and as such, this project wants to ask whether that yearning can be applied to superpowers.

The final three sources used were all from DC Comics. In the last few years, books have published celebrating anniversary of their characters. These contain essays on the history of the characters which each inspired a character for this project. The first book on Wonder Woman focused on how she was creating a new take on Greek mythology. The character introduced many readers to Greek figures they may have never heard of, or at least may have forgotten. In

that vein, this project will be including a character based off an even lesser known mythology: Welsh. The story chosen is traditionally known as for young boys, but was first translated into modern English by a woman. As such, it all seemed the perfect homage to Wonder Woman and the superhero/mythology connection.

The next book that I looked at focused on the history of Batgirl, one of the many sidekicks of Batman. The book goes through all the women to wear the mask of Batgirl and how they all took on the mantle after the previous one stopped. With how comics function, the women have not aged perfectly relatively to each other and are all rather close in age and Batman himself seems to have not aged a day. In addition, despite there being several Batgirls, they are all mentored by Batman, rather than each other. This project took this idea and created a character that has two former versions of the hero mentoring her.

The final book looked at covered Lois Lane, reporter and love interest of Superman. Early on in Lois Lane's fictional biography she was a war reporter and was a woman trying to make it in a male dominated field. While later comics would make her just a damsel in distress, she started as a strong female character fighting stereotypes. In the 1950's, Lois hunted down her sister's killers, and that storyline directly inspired a character. Combining that story, being in a male dominated industry, and the occasional issue where Lois got powers, a new, bright hero is born. With all the research laid and reasons to make these characters done, it was time to flesh out the new era of heroes.

### **Methodology**

To create the new characters a process had to be followed. As each article was read, a running tab was kept of character traits wanted and story ideas. As the list came together,

character traits and story ideas began to fall together and the final list of ten was settled upon. As each character was being written, they were being hashed out and described to the artist so that work could be begin on the concept art. Finally the art was placed alongside each character creating a full portfolio of new characters. A key component of this project was that not only will all these characters enter the public domain, they also all share a common universe. They can all appear in each other's story, allowing more and more women to interact with each other.

### **Characters**



### **Miss Cairo Jones**

The first character designed for this project is a repurposed public domain character. The first character is the 2019 redesign of Miss Cairo Jones. In the 1940's, Miss Cairo Jones was

created as a character hunting down her Nazi husband. She believed he was a banker, but he was actually funding the Nazi party. When he vanished with all his money, she decided to go on the hunt for him and bring him to justice. She finally finds him but it is too late as he has hung himself.

Since the copyright of Miss Cairo Jones has expired, I can now bring her back to prominence with a new retelling. This version of Miss Cairo Jones is Asian American as opposed to Caucasian. Instead of being a Nazi, I needed to update her husband's character. The most direct comparison would have been to make him a member of ISIS, but that would only work for so long. Eventually, just like the Nazi party, ISIS will fall and once again Miss Cairo Jones would be antiquated. Instead, the perfect post 9/11 Miss Cairo Jones sees her hunting down her gun-running, war dog husband. As long as wars continue, guns will be sold illegally. Having him part of this shady, loose group means that even once she has found him, there is still more work to be done. After she finds her husband, and actually keeps him from committing suicide so that he can serve his sentence, Jones turns to tracking down every one of his contacts. Her target is the entire gun-running industry, and that gives her an endless mission.

Her powerset is nothing, and instead she is armed to the teeth and trained in firearms. This goes against the stereotype of an Asian character to know martial arts. She cannot do a flying kick, but she sure can aim a rocket launcher. In her concept art she is seen in her normal outfit that is very subtle, just a basic black tactical set of clothes. She is wearing a bulletproof vest because above all else, this character is practical. Miss Cairo Jones falls closest to superheroes like the Punisher, but is much more careful about who she guns down.



### **chauve-souris d'or**

Yasmine Amari is a normal young woman in France. The most extraordinary thing about her is that she is Muslim, which is not exactly welcomed with open arms in her country. She had to forgo wearing a Hijab at school, had to be aware of people's beliefs of her, and still has to be careful how she acts in public. She has a very normal job working retail by day and sanitation third shift. The thing about Yasmine though, is that she has powers. The full extent of her superpowers are unknown, mostly because she does not care enough to find out. She works full time and is barely able to keep food on the table as it is. She does not have time to run around

playing vigilante. One day her friend finds out that she has super strength when Yasmine pulls a large piece of debris off of her.

Her friend convinced her that she needed to be using her superpowers to help people. Yasmine did not agree as no one else really cared about her. If the general population did not care about her or her people, then why should she care about them? Soon though, when she witnesses a robbery at her job, she decides that even if Islamophobia is rampant in her hometown and home country, she still has a duty to use her powers as best as she can. Her hero name literally translates to Bat of Gold, and she soon becomes a symbol in the slums. Instead of just going after traditional criminals, she goes after the people who persecute her, as it is not her job to take abuse, it is her job to punish bad people. This may seem a bit harsh, but in 2019 you should know that hate is bad, and she does not care about getting you caught up on who deserves to exist. Her name and symbol comes from that her mother always called her her little bat, as in Islam the bat is seen as a miracle, just like Yasmine.



**Solar Flare**

As mentioned in the literature review, Solar Flare is based off a creative writing project I did in high school. The original idea of the character was to create a standalone female tokusatsu hero. Tokusatsu is a genre from Japan of masked heroes involving lots of practical special effects and transformation scenes. The best known examples in America would be *Power Rangers* and *Kamen Rider*. That idea is still present, but a visual flare alone cannot support a character. This is why the addition of struggling with faith has been added to the character.

Akemi Graceland is a black belt in karate residing in Sydney, Australia who happened to luck into something amazing. One day she tripped and broke one of her karate trophies. Inside, a map led to a hidden island, where she was introduced to the ancient master who gave her the ability to transform into Solar Flare. In addition, she was given her animal companion and

guardian, Luna the owl. This all seems cheesy, but that is a big part of the appeal of tokusatsu stories. The mixture of this silly origin story will contrast nicely with the deeper elements of the story.

Akemi, as Solar Flare becomes known as the protector of Sydney. She becomes more and more well known until one day she finds out people know her too well. She is seen as a object of worship. People treat her like a deity, actually praying for her to protect them. Akemi is a devout Christian, however, who strongly believes that there is only one God and that no one else should be prayed to besides Him. This creates a inner turmoil that she has to fight through. Should she be a superhero if it is going to make people turn away from God? On top of that, how did she get these powers in the first place? Are they from God? If not, are they worth using in the first place? These kind of questions are not commonly found in tokusatsu stories, which is why I want to ask them.





**Tempest**

This character is the one based on Pinterest, as well as a bit of personal experience. When I was in middle school, I fell down a rabbit hole researching real life superpowers. Things such as sixth sense abilities, telekinesis, healing, things of that nature. There are entire websites dedicated to teaching people these abilities, and even though it never worked for me, what if it was true? That is the position that Alexa Florez finds herself in one night while lazily scrolling through Pinterest. Much like any normal person, she doubts that any of this could possibly be real, but decides to try just because. Curiosity gets the best of her and she reads extensively about chronokinesis, the ability to control time. That night she tries it, not expecting anything, but just as she dozes off, she manages to hold time still for just a second.

She finds herself diving deeper and deeper into the world of chronokinesis until she is able to actually control the flow of time actively. Soon she meets another person with kinesis abilities who helps guide her to use her abilities. She struggles with her new powers and is constantly wanting more. Deciding when to stop pursuing this and continue her life is a key point of her story. Tying back to the idea of yearning from the article, she is led by Pinterest and her new community of others with abilities deeper into the web of powers, but she must decide if sacrificing her current way of life is worth it. She is working with an extremely dangerous ability in chronokinesis, as time is not something to be trifled with lightly. The people she found welcoming at first turn out to not be so nice when she tries to quit using her powers, as she is the first to successfully use chronokinesis. She is seen as a valuable asset to them, and they begin to hunt her down so that she can be studied more. Their own yearning has led them to abandon morality in their pursuit of power.



**Rima**

Kelsey Green was a normal professor for over 20 years. She taught gender theory as well as sociology. One day her colleague needed a test subject for a new replacement for energy drinks she was formulating. The all male research board of the institute would not allow her to do any testing of it, and as such she had to ask friends such as Kelsey. While most people did not report any side effects, the concoction did something drastic to Kelsey. Suddenly, her logical ideas of how to take down the patriarchy through sound policy and education were replaced with more direct means. The first time she was exposed to the formula, she ended up killing a student at the university who had gotten away with blackmailing a female classmate and spreading her nude photos, all because he was a star athlete.

Being a rational human, she regretted this action, but still, it was nice to see the women of the student body just a bit more at ease. She took the formula again, and the results were as

expected. Going by Rima, she finds herself not needing the formula anymore to go to that place where she is willing to kill.

This character is clearly influenced by Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, as well as the split between the “academic” and “grrrl” categories of postmodern feminism. The idea of a character getting powers “because science” is also a well established trend in comic books that readers have come to accept. Examples of this include The Incredible Hulk, The Cat, Miss America, and even Captain America. While fitting nicely into established genre conventions, Rima also takes the idea in a direction that is has not gone before, as both parts of her want the same thing, but simply have different ways of going after what they want.



**Rhiannon**

The *Mabinogi* is a large collection of stories from Welsh mythology and often seen as the first written work of the culture. It was translated into modern English by Lady Charlotte Guest

in 1877. One of the many characters in the work is Rhiannon, who has powers outside of our normal realm. While in the original story she is not the primary focus, I believe she could become a beloved character today. In the original story she chooses a man as her husband, but her hand in marriage is taken away by a trick from the archenemy of her fiance. The men will not be important in this story, however, as this will be a prequel showing how she became the woman encountered in the story.

She is implied to not be from Wales, and is considered an Otherworld being. Her horse is magical, and she has a bag that can never be filled. She can never be approached by normal humans unless she chooses. There is so much that can be done with this character. How did she get the bag? Who are her parents? How did she end up in the forest on a magical horse. None of this is addressed in the original, leaving an entire character backstory to be written. In this version, the bag will be the item that she is after. Something that is a legend in her village, and she must travel far to find it. That journey is what leads her to her horse as well as the bag. Quest narratives are always exciting, and knowing that character is open about choosing who she wants to be with, she can have various companions along the way. She could become a symbol of agency and sexual freedom, choosing to be with people simply because she wants to along her journey. If the men of mythology are allowed to find women along the way, why can she not find some men or women if she chooses?



**Neon Sky**

Monica Darren knew from a young age she had superpowers. Not the super obvious ones like heat vision or flight, but she was smart enough to know a ten year old should not be able to lift a car, and maybe she should keep that a secret. Her home life was fine, her parents loved her, her family lived in the middle class, but still, a little extra money never hurt. She started hustling at a young age, betting a few dollars here and there on arm wrestling. When she was old enough she turned to wrestling as she was quite good at it. She made decent money from it, and was able to wrestle longer than just about anyone else.

The fights were all fixed, as professional wrestling is, and so to Monica it was just like a dance, and it was easy. By the time she was 21 she was famous across the country on the independent wrestling circuit. One night at a show someone held up the promoter at gunpoint. Of

course, for Monica, getting the money back was easy. She did not have some moral obligation, and she did not consider herself a vigilante, but the promoter had always treated her fairly, and some of that money was hers.

When we join her story, she has stopped a few more crimes since then, again not out of moral obligation, but sheer boredom. Wrestling is fake, no matter how many fights she wins, she has not truly beaten anyone. Fighting criminals is the only way she can really get a rush. She is an antihero in how she does not fight for justice, just to stave off boredom.

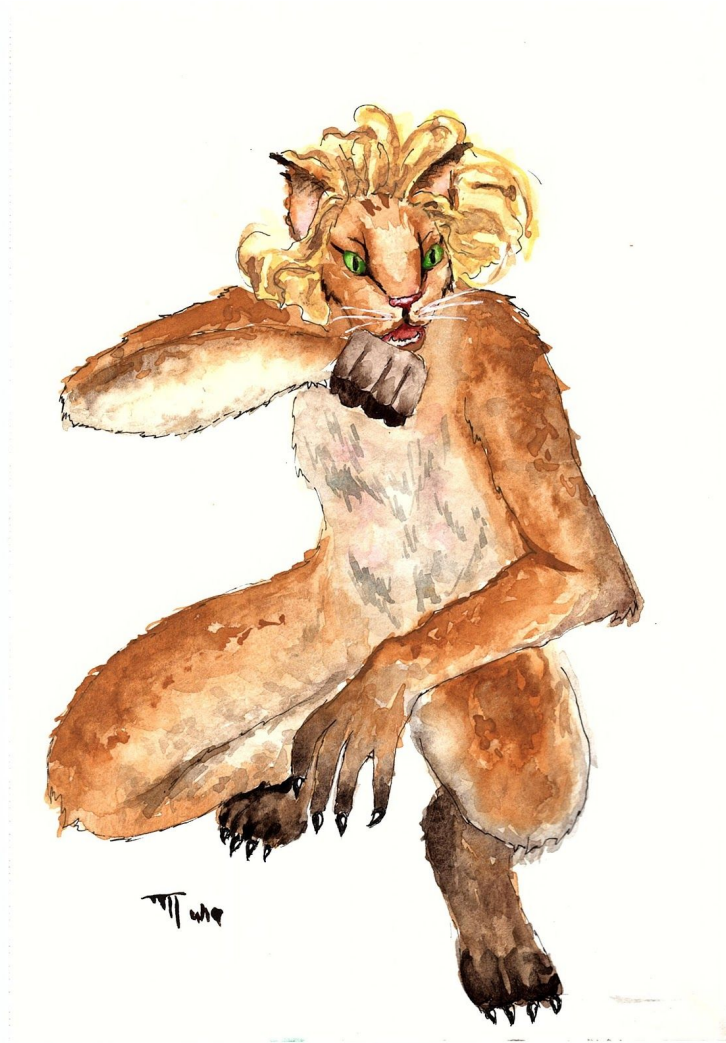


## **Gloom**

Katherine Night became the first Gloom way back in the 1940's when she put on a domino mask and decided to do something about the rising crime rates in her neighborhood. When she retired, she did not realize just how many people she had affected. A new Gloom take her place: Janice McBeal, and Katherine arranged a meeting with her. At first the two women just had coffee and chatted about the vigilante life, but soon Katherine became a mentor to



Janice. She began to help out by monitoring police scanners and other things like that. By today though, Janice is less active, and another Gloom has stepped. Allie Jones is now Gloom, fighting alongside Janice and mentored by Katherine as well. These three women all help each other, and come from completely different worlds, letting them be able to impart wisdom to each other.



**Snarl**

Peggy Ming was cursed. As a teenager she found a statue of a jaguar that told her she was going to turn into a monster for disturbing its rest. While the transformation started slowly at first, the odd hairball here and there, by the time she was 20 she had hair growing out of control , far beyond just a human without a razor. Now, at 25, she is more animal than human. Her teeth



have turned feline, her desire for raw, red meat has increased tenfold, and she is now extremely adept at hunting. At first she only stopped a criminal because she needed to feast and he was the closest moving prey, but then she realized something. For years, she had been told men were animals and to stay away, but now she was an animal. Nothing could stop her, and more specifically, no one.

Snarl is designed to flip expectations on their head, creating a woman who is extremely unattractive. She will never make for a nice glossy poster, but she will make for great nightmares. That is the goal of this character: a feral creature whose coolness comes from her feracity, not sexiness.



**LiveFire**

Donna McMillian is a coder working for a large healthcare company. While doing some debugging, she ran into a big conspiracy that duped thousands out of care, including her late sister. Donna has had powers since birth, but believed that using them was too much to deal with on top of her life. She had enough in her life without learning to fly. This led to her barely knowing how to use them. So despite having had powers for years, she is just now understanding the breadth of them. Due to her knowledge now of what the company did to her sister, she no longer cares about keeping her powers hidden and out of the limelight.

As a response to how much she kept her powers secret, she now has decided to be extremely extravagant. LiveFire is designed to be a combination of the powers of Superman and the personality of early Lois Lane. I believe this has been a success. She is willing to do whatever she needs to in order to bring the people behind her sister's death to justice. She has a bright attitude though, not being completely against joy when it comes to her own actions. She believes that the world is still good, just that the people behind her sister's death are bad.

She is partially created to still be a happy hero in a world of dark, brooding types. She functions as a sort of throwback character in that way.

## **Conclusions**

I think that this project was successful. It was a lot more difficult than I expected to not just have an idea, but realize it. Some characters first had power or design ideas, and then they gained a connection to a problem found in the literature review later on. Other characters started with the problem to be solved with the powers coming later. Having two ways that characters could be created led to problems keeping everything straight. The characters that were created though ended up being very fun to work with. They are now existing in a shared universe, and I

think certain characters would mash well together. For instance, Gloom and Chauve-Souris D'or would get along well if they visited each other's countries. Many of the younger heroes would have very interesting interactions, while characters like Miss Cairo Jones, Swoop, and Snarl may get along instead. This shared universe means that not only can these characters share stories but also that there will always be other female characters around. Even if other people add other characters, there will still be female characters discussing with each other. No other shared superhero universe has been built entirely on female heroes before, giving this world a distinct difference.

While certainly these characters alone will not fix every problem in superhero storytelling, or fill in every gap of characters that could exist, it is a step. Ultimately, it is not these ten characters that matter, what matters is the idea of seeing a flaw in something and actively creating a solution. As more and more people do this, the industry will be filled in with all kinds of voices and stories that have never been told in a superhero format before. That is the hope of this project: to expand the reaches of a superhero story. This project was a test not just of my academic ability, but creative ability, two things I am not used to putting side by side. This combination I believe to be very powerful, and hopefully more creators will use and explain the academic or research basis to their characters.

Future research for this project is obvious: more characters and more stories of existing characters. Taking these heroes and really fleshing them out will make them even more meaningful. This whole project is providing representation. These pictures illustrate that anyone, literally anyone, can be a superhero. As I am writing this, there are hundreds of people mourning the loss of Pua Magasiva, a Samoan man who played a Red Power Ranger. All day I have seen

people expressing how seeing him as a hero gave them hope that they could also be a hero. The entire point of these heroes is to not just tell cool stories, but to inspire the next generation that they too can be heroes. Again, a large thank you to Victoria Hauck for all the art contributed to this project, without that work this would be a bunch of novel ideas, and not a scrap of comic book to be found.

## Works Cited

Austin, Shannon. "Batman's Female Foes: The Gender War in Gotham City." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2015, pp. 285–295., doi:10.1111/jpcu.12257.

Shannon analyzed Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, and Catwoman to see how they function as villains to Batman through various comics. The characters were shown as having to prove themselves as viable villains to their male counterparts until they are in their element such as nature for Poison Ivy, and are then seen as even worse threats than the male villains.

This article described the idea of "The Other," which goes directly into a new character for this project. Taking the feline aspects of Catwoman, and pushing them further to a truly feral character.

Bajac-Carter, Maja, et al. *Heroines of Comic Books and Literature: Portrayals in Popular Culture*. Rowman Et Littlefield, 2016

This book contains several useful essays about women in comics. Some of the most important discuss the early women of Marvel comics being given defensive powers, wonder woman and the society of amazons, and the infamous naked she-Hulk cover. These essays analyzed the various ways that women have been treated in comics and how they are often put down both by the men in the story and by the writers themselves inserting themselves into stories.

While this did not directly inspire any of the characters in this project, the goal of less defensive characters and more offense based powers is present. Also the characters

are all designed to be taken seriously and not treated as sex objects. These essays helped set the overall tone of the project.

Baker, Kaysee, and Arthur A. Raney. "Equally Super?: Gender-Role Stereotyping of Superheroes in Children's Animated Programs." *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2007, pp. 25–41., doi:10.1080/15205430709337003.

This article analyzed 72 superheroes on children's television and did a study on the men compared to the women. They studied traits such as body shape, power types, actions taken in combat, and more. They found that there was much less body diversity in the women, and that their powers were limited.

This article led to a lot of inspiration and the push for racial and body diversity. This led to several of the characters in this project, and served as the backbone for this project.

Davis, Julie, and Robert Westerfelhaus. "Finding a Place for a Muslimah Heroine in the Post-9/11 Marvel Universe: New X-Men's Dust." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2013, pp. 800–809., doi:10.1080/14680777.2013.838370.

The authors discuss the creation of Dust after 9/11 and how the character has a lot of focus put on her religion in comparison to most characters. They determine that Dust is expected to be a sort of link between the Western world and Islam. Whereas most superheroes do have some sense of spirituality, Dust is held to a higher standard in focusing on her religion.

This project will include a Muslim character. This character will actively be avoiding the pitfalls found in *Dust* as described by this article. I want my Muslim character to not have nearly as much sexualization and skintight clothing as *Dust*.

Helford, Elyce, editor. *Woman Fantastic in Contemporary American Media Culture*. UNIV PR OF MISSISSIPPI, 2016.

This collection of essays included one on the miniseries *journey to liberty*. The book describes how the series fights back against negative stereotypes of single mothers. The book explains how comics can be subversive and give marginalized groups a voice and symbols of power. This particular miniseries did that and showed an alternative way of thinking to the one that was prevalent.

This particular essay inspired me to write a character that is not often portrayed in comics. The idea of subverting expectations and telling the story of a less observed character seemed appealing. The essay itself was well written and showcased a lesser known comic.

Holmlund, Chris. "Postfeminism from A to G." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2005, pp. 116–121., doi:10.1353/cj.2005.0008.

Homlund breaks down postfeminism into the three categories of "academic, chick, and grrrl." These three distinctions separate the kind of people participating in the movement. Academic refers to the people who study theory and look into the meaning of gender in society and how the world functions. Chick refers to the people who either do not care about the past waves of feminism, specifically second wave women's lib movement, or take for granted what was fought hard for. The grrl refers

to what we would today call “woke” in that they discuss theory in a much more casual way.

For this project I will be creating a “Jekyll and Hyde” style character using the “Academic” and “Grrrl” categories. This project will focus on these two categories and explaining how they could actually function in a superhero who identifies as a feminist.

Inness, Sherrie A. *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*.

Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

This book included an essay on former wrestler Chyna and described the way she was treated as a character. She went from being a monster to seen as a woman. She was considered beautiful despite being very muscular. The book cites her breast implants as a turning point in her perception by the crowd. She was given a liberal feminist character and fought many men in the company. Even though this was a positive, there were still negatives such as her rival Jeff Jerret beating up other women.

I've always loved wrestling and so this essay inspired me to create a hero who is also a wrestler, using Chyna as a template. I want to tell her character arc in a different way combining her day job as a wrestler with her other job as a superhero. This will create an interesting cross section between two aspects of pop culture, potentially introducing wrestling fans to superheroes and vice versa.

Jones, Hillary A. “New Media Producing New Labor: Pinterest, Yearning, and Self-Surveillance.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2016, pp. 352–365., doi:10.1080/15295036.2016.1220017.



This article compares Pinterest to scrapbooking. The visual appeal is the same but the biggest difference is that Pinterest is designed to look forward. A lot of the appeal of Pinterest is finding future projects to do, and creating a sense of yearning.

This specifically led me to a character using Pinterest to gain superpowers. The idea behind this is using this concept of yearning through Pinterest to keep pushing her skills to improve.

Kertechian, Sevag K., and Viren Swami. "The Hijab as a Protective Factor for Body Image and Disordered Eating: a Replication in French Muslim Women." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, vol. 19, no. 10, 2016, pp. 1056–1068., doi:10.1080/13674676.2017.1312322.

This article discusses French culture and Islamophobia that is present in the country. It sought out whether French Muslim women were similarly less likely to suffer eating disorders as those in other countries. In the background for this, they discuss the limitations on Muslim women in the country.

For this project, that background is the most important. The fact that Hijabs are banned in schools and that the face cannot be covered in public are laws that specifically limit the ways Muslims can worship in France. This inspired a French Muslim character for this project.

Madrid, Mike. *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*. Exterminating Angel Press, 2016.

Madrid's book goes through the history of female superheroes beginning in the 1940's and explains the way in which superheroes evolved over the decades. He

breaks the book down into alternating chapters focusing on a decade and then on a specific character or two. This allows for a wider view and a clear look at the history of female superheroes.

This book provided a lot of the background I needed for this project on the history of female superheroes. This is a book I can reference several times whenever I need an example of a character trait I want to follow or avoid. This book is an invaluable source for me to understand the history I am dealing with.

Marston, William Moulton, et al. *Wonder Woman, a Celebration of 75 Years*. DC Comics, 2016.

This book showcases several of the best Wonder Woman stories over the last 75 years. In between sections of comics the history of the character is told. Her creation by William Marston and the desire for her to be feminist is recounted, as well as how she functioned as a bridge between modern stories and ancient mythology. It then goes on to discuss her various reboots throughout the years.

The biggest takeaway from this book is the way that Wonder Woman strengthened the link between superheroes and mythology. Many later characters would do the same, but Wonder Woman really made it cool to bring an entire ancient culture behind a character. I will be doing the same in this project with Welsh mythology.

Schiff, Jack, et al. *Batgirl a Celebration of 50 Years*. DC Comics, 2017.

This book was made to showcase some of the best Batgirl comics written, and as such, included four transitional pieces about the various eras of Batgirl. The pieces

went through the lesser known first Batgirl, Betty Kane, before the other heroes such as Barbara Gordon and Stephanie Brown. It recapped about 50 years of history to explain the legacy of the character who has long been the female sidekick of Batman.

For this study, the long legacy of the character and the multiple women to don the cowl provides background for one of the characters designed. The personalities of the various Batgirls will create a new set of Women that have aged, creating generations of a hero.

Shafer, Daniel M., and Arthur A. Raney. "Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 62, no. 6, 2012, pp. 1028–1046., doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01682.x.

This article looked at three studies about antihero narratives and examined how people have become comfortable with their lack of moral compass. One of the big takeaways is how exposure to past antihero narratives makes people like new ones better. As more and more antihero narratives are being told more and more people will be exposed.

Using this, I decided at least one character in this project will be an antihero. With more and more people enjoying antihero narratives, if none of these characters are antiheroes then I would be missing a market.

Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. *Lois Lane: a Celebration of 75 Years*. DC Comics, 2013.

This book was created for the 75th anniversary of Lois Lane. In between sections of the book reprinting various comics, the book went through a brief history of Lois Lane. Lois was very independent in her early appearances, but would become more

of a love interest in the late 50's and lose a lot of that freedom. She would later begin a hunt for her sister's killers, and eventually marry Superman.

The inspiration from this book is a journalist character taking a lot of the wartime era elements of Lois Lane. The goal of the character inspired from here is to similarly put a woman in a male dominated profession, but merge her with the powers of someone like a Superman.

Stabile, Carol A. “Sweetheart, This Ain't Gender Studies’: Sexism and Superheroes.”

*Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2009, pp. 86–92.,  
doi:10.1080/14791420802663686.

This article looked at the TV show *Heroes* and its particular female characters. Even though women have superpowers in this show, they are primarily support abilities such as forcefields, and they need men with offensive powers to support them. Even though we accept insane superpowers, we cannot accept a woman without vulnerability.

This idea of creating women heroes who are not simply reliant on men is what I want to achieve in this project. As such I have been very careful to make sure that my women have offense based superpowers. This is a driving force behind the creation of these characters.

Wanzo, Rebecca. “The Superhero: Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation, and Desire.”

*Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2009, pp. 93–97.,  
doi:10.1080/14791420802663694.

This article uses *Watchmen* and *Strange Girl* to discuss the idea of superheroes as salvation. Both of these stories question whether we should put our trust in these supposedly super beings. It compares Christianity to superheroes and how the medium of comics has matured to actually question whether superheroes have our best interests at heart. It asks what cost are we willing to pay for our freedom.

This positioning of superheroes and Christianity led to an interesting idea of a Christian woman questioning her superpowers. The idea of salvation as it relates to heroes vs God played a major role in her creation.